1:Arensberg & Kimball E-5 (1932-1934) 1940.
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County Clare

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CUTTING TURF WITH THE SLÁN

[facing p. 72]

2: Campbell B, E-5 (1934-1935) 1937 ER6 Rural Irish ER6

342 discussing the herdsmen's oval and square straw-built houses in the Roman 171 Campagna. He indicates two different systems (1) the smoke leaving through the door and (2) the smoke leaving through a hole in the roof.

In English and especially in Saxon and other West European houses, the two opposite doors sometimes are placed in the same way as in the Welsh longhouses, or in the Irish houses, but the broad plan of these extremely large buildings makes the comparisons very vague.

Besides the types now mentioned which form the basis for the development of native house types, we find in Ireland of the present day many house types which are likely of foreign origin mostly introduced by government and landlord activities.

Belonging to this group I must also reckon a feature of housebuilding which is found particularly in Leinster and Eastern Connaught but also scattered here and there in other parts of the country. This distribution more [412] or less coincides with the distribution of the two-eared English spade, while the native type of house coincides with the single-eared Irish spade.

A partition of stone, mud or wood and lath is built on the side of the fireplace adjacent to the door, so that a person sitting at the fire cannot be seen through the open door. In the partition is a spyhole, through which one can see who is entering by the door, fig. 5.

This adjacence of fire and door with intervening partition is wellknown in England. As far as my knowledge goes I cannot look upon this as being an independent or original Irish type. Everything points to its being a late innovation. Such houses usually have a porch built at the entrance door and the arrangements of the rooms are not at all primitive.

The developed stone built house.

342 It is evident that as soon the primitive one-roomed stage is left, it will be difficult or impossible to decide whether the house represents the traditions of the central-chimney house or the traditions of the gable-chimney house.

In two ways the one-roomed stage has been left (1) by dividing up the one-roomed house by partition walls, (2) by building additions to it at the gables.

Usually it seems that the room at the lower end of the house has been made by building a thin partition wall, *síleail,* which separates it from the other part of the house, fig. 2 and 4. It is as far as I know, very unusual to build an addition to this part of the house. When new rooms are made by building additions, these are usually made to the chimney or fireplace gable.

8:Arensberg E-5 (1932-1934) 1937
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present the one staple which he must buy off the farm. This last he shares with the big farmer and the townsman, but otherwise he buys little of the meats and the shop products which fall to the lot of townsman and big farmer.

Neither type of farmer has much use yet for mechanized agriculture as we know it; for both are cattlemen. Nevertheless, the small farmer differs again in the tools he uses. He is the one who clings to hand tools; in poorer districts he must rely upon spade, flail, and scythe. The size of his farm and the poor quality of his land confine him to the manual tools.

Lastly, big farmers and small farmers work their lands quite differently. On the big farm, the farmer-owner uses hired labour. On the small farm, the owner relies upon the united efforts of his family. The countryman's subsistence farming is a family economy in which all members of the family take part—sons, daughters and other relatives. He differs completely in this regard from the large farmer, who is an employer and whose hands are wage earners.

This recitation of the distinguishing marks of peasant economics serves a purpose. It reveals in a roundabout manner what sort of livelihood it is that the countryman wrests from his land. He works a small farm with the help of his family. He raises a small garden of potatoes and a few other foodstuffs which feed both himself and his beasts,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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352 workmanship of the Welsh oak dressers, is an essential part of the kitchen and, like the keeping-holes mentioned above, has its prototype in the stone shelves of some of our oldest prehistoric dwellings. The dresser belongs, like so many of the other elements we are discussing, to the "Atlantic" province of European folk-culture. It accompanies the open hearth tradition as distinct from the "oven tradition" of central Europe, and may be thought of (compare the absence of the large table mentioned below) as providing storage while taking up a minimum of the valuable floor space in small single-roomed houses. The dresser has its fixed place in the layout of the kitchen, the position varying, however, according to the district, the type of house, disposition of the doors, and so on. In the outshot houses it stands against the side wall alongside the bed, whereas in the central-hearth type it lies 352 across the kitchen opposite the fire and helps to partition off 415 the end room. The bottom of the dresser is open. Here the hen-coops, of straw, wattle or wood, were sometimes kept, but one is more likely to see a collection of iron pots and the crocks, buckets or wooden stave-built vessels (piggins) for holding water or milk. The latter I have seen covered with roughly trimmed stone slabs (Fig. 68), a prehistoric device which has the advantage of coolness and gives protection from the cats. On the dresser are a few bits of "delph" and the tin mugs which have displaced the wooden noggins. Delph, as kitchen-ware is called, has not long since become general in remote parts. Of Mayo in the last century we read that "all their vessels were of wood, most of them cut out of solid timber." These included not only platters, spoons and ladles, but also methers or drinking cups of various sizes. Where the crockery tradition is of old standing, plates, jugs and long rows or nests of bowls "whammeled," that is tumbled on their sides, line the dresser shelves. Here, too, are the beetles of different shapes (Fig. 30) used for pounding or mashing the potatoes. The upright milk churn commonly finds its place alongside the dresser.

352 Fig. 30.

One very rarely sees a table of any antiquity in an Irish kitchen: it is generally of deal and it is placed against one of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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ago a still simpler plough described as a " crooked stick armed with a bit of iron," which must have been in no way different, apart from " the bit of iron," from the plough of the Bronze Age. In fact there were wide areas where a plough of any kind was practically unknown, and it must be admitted that in the small stoney fields of the west the spade is much more serviceable. It is still the only implement used on hundreds of small farms, and at best the spade had to supplement the old types of plough around the headlands and among the stones and rocks. Moreover the wooden plough left the ground so uneven that lumps had to be broken with a maul or " mell " (Fig. 44) and holes filled in with the spade to prevent the seed being " lost." This process was known in Co. Antrim as " mannering." Cross-ploughing seems to be an old Irish custom and helps to explain why the field system is rectangular in contrast to the long strips of ploughland associated with the heavy English wheeled plough.

Fig. 44.

In preparing ground whether for corn or potatoes the practice was to plough the land in narrow ridges varying in width from about 4 to 12 sods (say 3½ to 10 feet) according to the depth and nature of the soil. The furrow or " sheugh " between the ridges would be some two feet wide. This was scraped with the plough but not turned, and it provided the earth for shovelling on the ridges after the seed had been sown. " An old ridge in the ground," runs an Irish saying, " outlives three yews " ; and indeed ancient cultivation ridges can be seen at all but the highest levels and have been observed underneath bogs when they are cut away. The plough ridges

Fig. 45.

Old cultivation ridges and remains of rath, Scrabo, Co. Down.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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Fig. 46.

the bed and the furrow varies considerably from one locality to another. The latter may be as much as three feet on shallow soils, for it is essential to have sufficient earth both to cover the seeds and to mould the young plants, generally in two stages, later on, but an average width is 1½ feet. Similarly the ridges, while about 4 feet wide as a rule, may be as narrow as two feet. The first step is to turn over the sods from the furrow, one sod on each side, and place them face down, that is grass against grass, on the ridges, so that when they are buried the grass rots and helps to feed the growing crop. With the many methods of turning the sod, of preparing the seed-bed, manuring, setting and covering the potatoes it is impossible to deal here, for the customs differ from one district to another, the manure being spread, for example, sometimes under and sometimes over the seeds. But it is relevant to notice that the old Irish spade or loy (Chapter 13) is a specialized implement adapted for sod cutting and turning and not for

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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digging or shovelling. For these processes the digging fork and long-handled shovel are the proper tools. (Fig. 65). It should also be remarked that the preparation of lazy-beds was communal team-work, undertaken by groups of from 8 to 16 men who shared their labour under the system of voluntary co-operation which distinguished the village community. The custom is maintained in a few localities.

The loy served in certain districts as a dibber for setting the potatoes "against the back of the spade." but various special dibbers were also used. There was, for instance, the large two-handed "steeveen" found from Co. Leitrim to Co. Clare. As another example of a dibber we illustrate the clumsy-looking "stamp" from Co. Armagh (Fig. 47), employed in sowing turnips. Reference will be made elsewhere (Chapter 16) to the use of seaweed as manure. Old thatch, with its content of soot from the turf fire, is occasionally used as a fertilizer, and I am told that in Achill Island miniature stone, sod or turf buildings used as "soot houses" are roofed with rafters and scraws each autumn. Fires are lit in them, the smoke depositing soot on its passage through the thatch. This is then stripped off and, with the ashes of the fires, spread on the land as manure in spring. The thatch of the Hebridean black houses was utilized in the same way.

Fig. 47.

A practice which was formerly widespread and attracted a great deal of heated discussion in the period of agricultural development at the end of the 18th century was the preparing of waste ground for cultivation by "paring and burning," or "denshiring." It seems probable that this was a survival of ancient custom, and I believe that old-fashioned tool, the flachter, was probably employed for the purpose, just as its sister-tool, the breast-plough, was in England. Many types of tools were perfected for land reclamation, including a special skinning-plough. In the south-west a heavy hoe or mattock, known as a graffan—similar to the implement still used in Kerry for breaking clods on potato ridges—was popular as a paring tool, the sod being rolled with the foot as it was cut. By such laborious processes, and by centuries of

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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toil and grazing, by plough and spade, hoof and muzzle, have Ireland's green fields been "moulded."

Clips

Fig. 48.

Although we cannot touch on the other crops and have given a very inadequate idea of the bustle, worries and humours of the Irish springtime, when all the crops demand to be put in the ground at the same time, we must end this chapter with a few comments on the growing season. The general practice when thinning root crops is to work on the knees with the hands: one rarely sees a hoe being used for thinning. Yet paradoxically corn is weeded, if it gets any attention at all, with a pair of wooden pincers or thistle-pullers, called, in Co. Antrim, "clips" (Fig. 48). This tool is already mentioned in a Tour of Ireland in 1752. The weeders are not so common in the south of the country and are fitted with iron pincers in some counties. Another home-made device once familiar in the north was the crow-scarer or "corn-crake," a noisy instrument made on the principle of the watchman's rattle or—to give a modern instance—the gas rattle of the A.R.P. services.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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the purest of linen—the story has often been told—and though the scutching mill with its busy waterwheel is an intimate part of the wintry countryside, the flax and tow soon pass into the factories. But we cannot omit a reference to the picturesque oblong stacks "sleighs" or "rays" in which the flax is built after being taken from the dam and dried. And we have referred in another place (Chapter 7), to the "shows" or waste which comes from the scutching mill.

But the most important crop throughout Ireland, and as a rule the most difficult to save because it comes late in the season, is oats. September is the harvest month, but in the hills October frequently sees the corn uncarried and even uncut. It is on record that in 1817—in Co. Armagh—"the grain was not reaped in many places until after Christmas." Often the equinoctial gales play havoc with the stooks, and in the days of small scattered rundale plots it was customary for each holder to tie his sheaves with a proprietary knot so that he might claim his own.

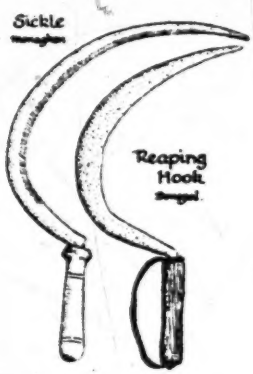

Fig. 53.

Both the toothed hook or sickle (Fig. 53) and the smooth "scythe hook" are used in reaping: the reaping machine and the self-binder have not reached many parts. Sickles are of several varieties, classified in the catalogues as round,

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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square, crane and "Sligo." The steel edge of its narrow blade is notched on the underside, the notches radiating so that they all cut at an angle of about 70 degrees.

It is much more difficult to use than the smooth hook; the straw must be held firmly in one hand and sawn through with a pulling motion. Some writers have indulged in idealized pictures of hand reaping which bear little relation to the cruel toil and "terrible strain" more faithfully and unforgettably portrayed by Richard Jefferies in his "Field and Hedgerow." There was no respite for reapers or binders: "Down with the head and up with the tail" was the descriptive phrase which I was given in the Glens of Antrim. In some parts, however, the reaper knelt down on one knee. Women and children generally did the binding. The corn was cut before it was fully ripe, "between green and gold," and as an illustration of the interdependence of the old ways it is worth noting that such straw was much more suitable for good thatching than the dry straw from the reaper. The old-fashioned scythe (see Frontispiece), not yet entirely displaced by the new style, was straight-handled. A short bladed tool, known in Co. Antrim as the "bramble scythe," is used for cutting coarse vegetation or mowing hay around bushes.

Corn stooks vary greatly in the number of sheaves they contain and in the methods of construction. They are often tied at the top with a straw band, and cap-sheaves are frequently seen. In wet districts the sheaves are later built into small round stacks, "barts" or "huts," until the time comes to carry them home. On small farms this is still done on the back, using a burden rope (Chapter 14), but the rick-lifter is also employed. Or the sheaves are piled high on ponies so that they resemble walking stacks. At harvest time two-ply twists of straw are worn in the button-hole (Fig. 114): they are part of the ceremonial of harvest time. The custom is general in north-eastern Ireland but I am not aware of it from other parts: it may be a feature of the Plantation. More widespread and fundamental are the practices, now mere

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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CHAPTER XIII.

SPADES.

The rich variety of the rural scene is perhaps best illustrated in that most characteristic of Irish implements, the spade. It is worth recalling that the spade-work of immigrant navvies—or "navigators," named after the canal-diggers—was one of Ireland's contributions to England's Industrial Revolution. A visit to city garden-plots will provide a useful introduction to the study of spades, for the countryman insists on his own pattern, and you may play the game of spotting the native heaths of Belfast's or Dublin's retired policemen by identifying the spades of Derry, Fermanagh, Cavan or Clare. Some idea of the variety of tastes catered for can be gained from the output of a Galway spade-factory: including turf spades (Chapter 15) it turns out about 150 shapes of blade.

Obviously it would require prolonged travel and study to record and interpret this fascinating diversity, and to compare the distribution of spade-types with landforms and territorial divisions, with dialects, folk-customs, house-types and other aspects of material culture. But it is possible to give some tentative generalisations which emerge from a preliminary study. The primary division is between the one-eared and the two-eared types (Fig. 61). The former, known as the "loy" or "fack," prevails along the western and southern coasts. It is now unknown in the Six Counties—though the "kib," as it was called, is remembered by a few old men—and is fast disappearing from Donegal and from the Midlands,

Fig. 61.

[p.113]

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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where its place has been taken by the two-eared spade; and it seems clear that the latter is the result of English influence, though in its Irish forms it differs considerably from the modern English spade.

These differences are no doubt adaptations to native taste and usage: they include the long straight handle, without hand-grip, the long narrow blade with its thick sides, the foot-plates, and the "lift" in the blade, that is the forward bend below the socket, which makes it enter the ground at an angle. North of the Boyne, however, the handle is shorter and is fitted with a crutch-end (Fig. 62), although there are certain "islands" of Irishry, such as the Mourne Mountains of Down, which cling to the long handle. Within the two-eared spade province there are many regional and even seasonal types of blade, for instance the Sligo-Roscommon area demands a long-bladed spade in spring and a shorter type in autumn, the length varying from 16 to 13 inches. In this spade the blade tapers, say from 5 inches at the shoulders to 3½ at the mouth; the Lurgan spade is a long variety familiar from the phrase: "a face as long as a Lurgan spade." While characterising the east coast and the Midlands the type spreads westwards to Sligo without, however, influencing Leitrim, which uses the loy, or Cavan, where the spade has an expanding edge, half an inch or more wider than the shoulders. A strong "cranked lift" of 6 inches (about 22°) is a feature of the Cavan spade, and of the Leenane spade in Galway. North Monaghan, Donegal and Fermanagh (Fig. 62) also use a spade with expanding edge and cranked lift. The taper spades, on the other hand, generally have a "round lift," that is the blade bends forward in a smooth curve, but both the degree of lift and the dish, that is the curve in the mouth, vary from one locality to another. Tyrone and Armagh have a spade which widens slightly towards the mouth but has a round lift instead of the cranked lift of Cavan and Fermanagh. A spade map would throw light on many aspects of rural history and geography, but these humble motters do not engage the attention of our educationalists.

Fig. 62.

. 9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

These two-eared spades are always attached to the haft by means of straps about 6 inches long, generally with two rivets: the foot-plates are fastened to the blade by mortice and tenon and to the handle by a drawn-down tongue bent up and nailed between the straps (Fig. 62). A visit to one of the 9 or 10 Irish spade "factories"—there were many more a few decades ago—provides a thrilling illustration of craftsmanship and co-ordination of labour. The five hundredweight tilt-hammer, driven by a water wheel, beats out the red steel in a series of operations under the skilled hand and eye of the spade-maker: between each process the steel must be re-heated, and the interchange of the "moulds" and "plates" between furnace-man and hammer-man goes on without pause, for the "bit" of the hammer must not be allowed to strike without having the hot metal ready on the anvil. In addition to supplying his mate, the furnace-man has to bend over the "fullered mould" and weld and shape it on a small anvil: he must also apply sand and water to the plates if they get overheated, and dip the folded end in dust so that the two straps do not weld together under the hammer. After a period of ceaseless labour and watchfulness a pile of blue-grey drawn plates, their hammer grooves throwing back the glow of the furnace, lies ready for the finishing smith.

He shears them to the desired dimensions—all the measuring is done by eye although there are dozens of different sizes—cuts out the tenons and punches the rivet holes. The points of the straps separate when the ends are clipped, and the socket is now opened up and shaped on a mandrel. Then comes the finishing: the plate is heated once more, hammered into the correct lift and dish, and tempered. Meanwhile lengths of rivets have been cut and the foot-plates drawn down: the ash handle is inserted and riveted, the straps hammered tight against the wood and the foot-plates morticed and nailed on. Four generations of experience lay behind the smith whom I watched recently in a Co. Antrim spade factory; the result was a product of exquisite proportions and economy of structure, the essentials of the country craft.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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412 We must visit a factory in the south if we wish to see the single-eared "Irish" spade being made. The country smith may still forge or repair an occasional loy, but the trip-hammer does away with so much heavy sledging that most of the work is concentrated in the "factories." Yet, as the amazing variety of patterns demonstrates, there is no tendency towards specialization: the factory has merely taken over the work of dozens of rural smiths. Thus at least five different types of loy are used in Co. Galway alone. The blade may be straight sided, it may taper slightly or it may expand towards the mouth, and like the two-eared spade it may have a cranked or a round lift; but it is always narrow, ranging in width from 3½ to 5 inches. The loy is in fact a specialized implement, adapted for sod-cutting and ridge-making (Chapter 10); it is not designed to turn over dug soil, and like the two-eared spade which has taken over its functions in the north and east, it enters the ground at an angle and not vertically.

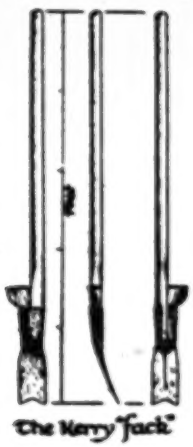

Fig. 63.

412 In the south-west, from Clare round to Kilkenny, the "fack" ends in a fish-tail, presumably to facilitate penetration (Fig. 63). In central Galway the loy has a 14 inch

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

blade with a slightly fish-tailed edge which is a little wider (5 inches) than the foot end (4½ inches): it has a cranked lift. In east Galway a similar loy is fitted with a curious two-piece haft: the foot-rest or "spade-tree" which goes into the socket of the blade is fastened to the stout ash shaft with iron bands (*cf.* Fig. 88). A similar loy was formerly used in Leix and other counties. In Limerick and Kerry the foot-piece is a small wedge pushed into the socket alongside the handle (Fig. 63). In parts of Galway and Mayo the foot-rest is carved out of a broad handle, and a variant of this is the loy of Cavan and Longford (Fig. 61), where the stout foot-rest is some distance above the socket and the handle is curved forward. In Clare, again, the handle bends backwards towards the user.

But loys of all shapes have long handles, about 4 feet in length, with no hand-grip. And they all take the handle in an open socket formed by bending the wings, which may or may not be further secured by nails, over the wood (Fig. 63). This method of hafting goes back to the prehistoric Iron Age in England. In Ireland, bill-hooks, axes and knives from crannogs and forts a thousand years old were hafted in this way, and though I am not aware of any ancient spades having been found in excavations, it is to the La Tène period (Chapter 4) that we should probably look for their origin. But until some attention and support are given to problems of cultural origins and evolution we are merely groping in the dark. Allowance must be made, therefore, for possible inaccuracies in the present account.

Loys of all types can be fitted with the ear or foot-rest on either side according to the practice of the locality or the individual user. Generally speaking, about eleven out of twelve loys are right footed, but towards the east the proportion of left-footed users increases, and as we reach the north-east, where, of course, the two-eared spade is universal, from one-half to two-thirds are left-footed diggers. Hence, presumably, the phrase applied in the north to those of the Roman Catholic faith: "they dig with the wrong foot."

Fig. 64.

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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412 While it is difficult to estimate the antiquity of the two-eared
184 spade tradition in Ulster and Leinster, its spread into the west has taken place in the last half century. The decline in the use of the loy is symbolic of the disappearance of the old
[178] fashions, and they tend to vanish together because the culture pattern is a closely interwoven web. Thus it was considered in Donegal a century ago that the new iron spades "would be useless," since few workers had shoes: the wooden spade was adapted to the bare feet.

391 The spade-maker is called on to turn out other types of
412 agricultural tools, spades, shovels and forks. There is the very narrow tapered draining spade and the heavy "mountain draining spade" used in the moorland areas of the north and west (Fig. 64): its great "shark's head" blade is 17 inches long and almost as wide. Occasionally he is asked to rough out a flachter (Fig. 85), which the country smith finishes into the required shape, or it may be, in the south-west, a graffan or heavy hoe (Chapter 10). But as the turf-cutting season comes round most of his energies go into the making of turf slanes (Chapter 15). Of shovels there are several different types, generally classified into two shapes, round-pointed and square-pointed: the latter kind is favoured in the west. There is also the tanged shovel of Co. Wexford. The shovels are long-handled, but short handles are used for special purposes. The welding of the socket in the thin hard steel of the shovels is one of the smith's most difficult tasks (Fig. 65).

412 Then there are short and long-handled square-shouldered digging forks with three or with four prongs (Fig. 65), and the round-shouldered manure-forks or graips, the prongs of which may be round, oval, or in old-fashioned work, square. There are drags for unloading manure, for gathering wrack (Fig. 103), for cleaning drains and gathering stones. Hay-forks may be tanged or strap-hafted, with 4-foot or 5-foot handles and so on. Some country-made forks are illustrated in Fig. 66. It may be added that hayforks with wooden prongs cut from the solid have also been used in the past. Some of the loys, like the old Ulster kib, are essentially wooden spades merely shod with iron, and even this was dispensed with in sandy soils. Wooden

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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spades are said to have been used in Magilligan, Co. Derry, and in Mayo the forked-spade or "gowl-gob" is perhaps not entirely forgotten. It consisted of a wooden blade, with

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Fig. 65.

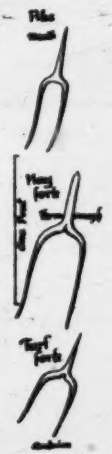

Fig. 66.

two prongs each some three inches wide shod with iron, and was employed for potato-digging in sandy or loose bog soils.

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9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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281 415 across, are commonly arranged in patterns having, for example, the maker's initials and the date left unpierced. A deeper tray used for carrying corn or for fruit-picking is known as a "dallan." Then there is the meal sieve, which has fine perforations, for sifting the coarse skins (meal seeds) from the oatmeal. Similar to this is the buttermilk sieve with which, 285 415 before the adoption of the hair sieve, the small particles of butter were strained from the buttermilk. A milk-strainer made of birch bark folded into a cone and filled with straw is referred to in a 17th century account quoted by Mr. E. MacLysaght. In Tory, according to Mr. T. Mason, the wight is "composed simply of sheepskin with a twisted straw rope forming the rim."

The corn sieve, for getting out dust and dirt, and the corn riddle (Fig. 71), for separating bits of straw and "hairy

[281]

Fig. 71.

tails," consist of interwoven splits of ash or bog-fir attached to a rim of the same material. The only difference between them is that the mesh of the former is one-eighth of an inch, of the latter perhaps ¼ inch, though it may vary for different kinds of grain. Efficient riddling is a difficult and nowadays rather rare art. I have not come across sieves of rushes or split willow, but it is very likely that they may be found.

243 412 The corn riddle and the winnowing tray lead us back to the thrashing floor in the barn. Here we will probably see a flail hanging on the wall. The sound of the flail is by no means rare in Ireland, for in outlying districts the small farmer has no other means of thrashing. The three parts of the flail are the helve or "hand-stave," a straight stick of any light wood such as ash or larch, the shorter and heavier swingel or beater, called in Ireland the "souple" (generally made of hazel, occasionally of holly or birch) and the flail-joint, hanging or [284] "mid-kipple," which may be a sheep- or goat-skin thong, a

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942
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length of flax, or an eel skin. The methods of attaching the hanging to the hand-stave and souple vary, as will be seen from a random selection of drawings (Fig. 72). The joint

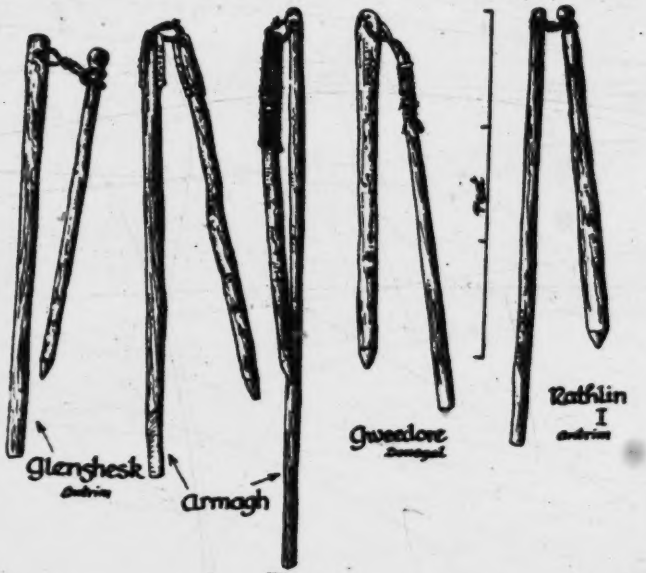

Fig. 72.

shown in the Armagh flail (left), resembles a common English style, but it occurs as far west as Galway. Varied too, are the proportions between the component parts and the methods of swinging the flail. Thus in Antrim the souple is flung round the head while in Donegal it is kept to the side of the body. On fine days the thrashing may take place out of doors, but the usual place is " between doors " in the barn or even in the kitchen, for the opposite doors create a draught which carries away the dust. A besom of heather or of dried kale flower-stalks keeps the barn floor clean. [824]

One of the most interesting and varied and probably one of the oldest crafts practised by countryfolk is the making of 285

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
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Inishbofin

The spinning-wheel and hand-loom are the same as those commonly used on the west coast, the former, as usual, having no treadle. 172 [283]

Querns are still in use, and in connection with them the boran, or sieve of sheepskin stretched over a wicker frame, used for screening the meal. [252] [412]

Grain is still winnowed by shaking it in a sieve in a strong wind. [243]

The method of washing clothes is the same as that customary in Connemara, the clothes being folded, laid in the water of a lake or pool, and beaten with a club or paddle. [296]

The tailor, when making clothes, does not measure his customers with a tape, but takes all his measurements on one sheet of paper, marking the lengths by cutting notches out of the edge. [294]

The curraghs, which are still in use, are of the usual form; they are rapidly going out of fashion, however. [501]

The anchor used for small boats is a stone, not fixed in a wooden clamp, as in Clare and Aran, but having a groove around it for the rope.

As mentioned previously, the apparatus used for the shark-fishing is very rude and primitive.

2. *Antiquities.*— Inishbofin is not very rich in architectural antiquities, and the few that still remain are being rapidly destroyed; some ruins which were standing in the first half of the present century have altogether disappeared, and the others are much shattered. 172

In Inishshark, also, the buildings have sustained a great injury.

It does not lie within my province to enter upon any detailed description of the ruins; but I desire, in the following notes (extracted almost *verbatim* from my Field Note-book), to direct the attention of archæologists to the buildings of interest in these islands which are being rapidly blotted out of existence. The number and nature of these have been described by the late Mr. O'Donovan, Mr. Hardiman, Mr. G. H. Kinahan, and others.

In the account of their present condition given below, they are arranged in the order in which they are described by Mr. Hardiman.[1]

Inishbofin.—(1). St. Colman's church, in Knock townland, built in A.D. 667, is in a very ruinous state, and the interior is filled with rough gravestones and weeds, and in a small recess near the east window is a pile of crania and broken bones. In the enclosure around the church the foundations of the cells (cloghans (?)) of the abbey, or monastic colony, may still be traced, though with difficulty, but the

[1] "H-Iar Connaught," p. 116, footnote.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Inishbofin

113 OFFICIAL:

"Parliamentary Gazetteer of Ireland."—Dublin, 1846.

"Memoirs of the Geological Survey of Ireland. Explanatory Memoir of Sheets 73, 74, 83, 84."—Dublin, 1876.

WILDE, LADY FRANCESCA:

"Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland. with Sketches of the Irish Past."—London, 1887.

EXPLANATION OF PLATES VIII. AND IX.

PLATE VIII.

142 FIG. 1.—James Joyce, aged 48 years, No. 5, Middlequarter.

291 FIGS. 2 AND 3.—Anthony Lavelle, aged 35 years, No. 2, Knock.

FIG. 4.—Group of men, Inishbofin.

Taken in order from left to right, the names are, respectively:—

Back row.—John Burke, boatwright; Michael Halloran, king of Shark; John Tierney, postman; Mick Kerrigan, weaver; Redmond Toole, fisherman.

Front row.—Martin Baker, John Malia (or Malley), Ned Burke, Redmond Toole, all fishermen.

FIG. 5.—Group of women, Westquarter, Inishbofin.

Taken in the same order as the other group, the names are—Margaret Ward, Nancy Browne (first cousins), Nelly Holloran, Mary Holloran (daughter of last), Brigid Concannon.

PLATE IX.

412 FIG. 1.—Quern still in use in Middlequarter, Inishbofin.

283 FIG. 2.—Spinning wheel in Middlequarter.

296 FIG. 3.—Method of washing clothes, Church Lough, Knock.

10: Browne D-5 (1893) 1894
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Inishbofin

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[End Plate B]

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

Ireland. Barrett, Burke, Carey, Joyce, M'Andrew, Walsh, and probably Williams (if it be, as is alleged, a form of Mac William or Mac Quillin). 551

(C.) The immigrants from Ulster come next, amongst whose descendants are said to be the O'Donnells, Connells, Doghertys, Gallaghers, Geraghtys, Reillys (from Cavan), and perhaps M'Loughlins.

(D.) The Mac Cormicks came into the district in the reign of James I.

(E.) Last come names of English origin, the most ancient of which seems to be Bingham, dating from the reign of Elizabeth. Tollet, and probably Dixon, are names of descendants of the Shane settlers. The other English names are of shorter standing, and some of them may really be anglicised local surnames.

The names of the English settlers signed to the petition to Sir Henry Bingham, sometime in the reign of Queen Anne, are Higginbotham, Maxwell, Dennistoun, Linney, Langford, Tollett, Houston, Parker, Gamble, Calwell, and Low; of these, Tollett is the only one now found in the parish, if Gammell be not a corrupted form of Gamble.[1]

IV.—SOCIOLOGY.

1. *Occupations.*—Excluding the inhabitants of the little town of Belmullet, in which most of the tradesmen reside, the people are, as a rule, either fishermen or farmers, or they combine both occupations. There are a few large holders and proprietors, but the majority of the farms are of small size. These holdings are but poorly fenced, a frequent cause of dispute. Fences are usually earthen or turf, but on the islands dry stone walls, such as are seen in Aran, are common. The principal crops are barley, oats, rye, and potatoes. All the farming is rude and primitive. Spade labour is practically universal, the spades being of modern form, as the old "gowel"[2] or "gowel-gob," a two-bladed or forked wooden spade formerly used here, has long been extinct. 463 241 [351] [412]

In 1834 there were only 3 ploughs and the same number of carts in use in the Mullet: now (1895) the number of ploughs is 30, and of carts 63. [407] [493]

[1] Though these settlers are spoken of as English by the various writers who have mentioned the colony, yet the majority of these surnames appear to be Scotch.

[2] A specimen of this curious agricultural implement is figured in the Catalogue of Antiquities of the Royal Irish Academy.

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

his death to his interference with this figure. An Inishkea man spoke about the matter with much indignation even after the lapse of years, and said that they had never known misfortune or hunger in the island until after the distruction of this *neewogs*. 778

Many different accounts have been given of the image itself. One writer (C. O.) states that it was a stone figure of rude workmanship, and that it was dressed in a suit of homespun, renewed every year.

The description given by those who have seen it agree in stating that it was not a statue but a small flat stone. One informant believed it to be part of the head of a stone figure. This was enveloped in a small bag of homespun, which was replaced when it got old and soiled, and was kept in a blind window or recess in the wall in one of the houses.

St. Brendan and the Devil.—During my visit to Inishglora some of the Inishkea fishermen, who were camped there at the time, pointed out that no grass grew on a part of the island, and gave the following explanation :—St. Brendan was one day disturbed in his devotions by the devil, who appeared to him in the form of a beautiful girl and tempted him. The saint indignantly repulsed the temptress, and drove her towards the end of the island, blessing the soil as he went, but at the point where the grass ends, Satan changed his form and assumed the shape of a ram, which so astonished the saint that in his excitement he ceased blessing and gave chase to the evil one who ran to the rocks and jumped into the sea. The unblessed land is that on which the grass does not grow. 776

VI. ARCHÆOLOGY.

The few notes made in this section do not purport to be fully descriptive, but merely to indicate the nature of the antiquities of the region, which are of importance in the study of the people as bearing on the history of their past, and to direct the attention of archaeologists to the quantity of material worthy of study and record which is still to be met with in this part of county Mayo. 172 178

1. *Survivals.*—The district is comparatively rich in these, though many articles in use in the localities previously reported on are now quite extinct in Erris. The primitive condition of many of the houses, the absence of chimneys, and the custom of taking cattle into the dwellings have already been referred to. 178

The quern is still in use in several houses, especially on the islands and in the remoter localities, though now only employed for 178 412

11: Browne D-5 (1894) 1895
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
Kilmore

178 grinding barley for cattle food, or in some few cases for malt for [412] *poteen*.

Hooped piggins are used in many houses, as also are sheepskin [415] sieves (*borans*).

The spinning-wheel for wool is of the usual Connaught type, without treadle, and is made in the district. The cards used for the wool are imported, being all made in Dublin. The hand-looms are the same as used elsewhere in the West, and of rather rude construction, though capable of turning out good work.

A machine of rather primitive design is used for compressing cloth. It was made by its user, and has been working for many years.

Rush-lights are used in some houses, and in others the rude lamp already referred to, which is evidently merely a reproduction in tinware of the old stone or iron lamp for fish oil.

The stills employed by the makers of poteen are constructed of tin, and of simple but effective design. They are made in the owners houses by tinkers.

The curragh, of the usual form, is the boat most in use, and seems likely to hold its own. It is now covered with tarred canvas, but seventy years ago horse-skins were used for this purpose. A large stone is often used as an anchor for small boats.

2. *Antiquities* may be divided into two classes—(*a*) Architectural remains, and (*b*) Articles of use or ornament. (*a*) Architectural remains are still very numerous, though many of the most interesting have altogether disappeared; of these the most noticeable was the *Oileach*, the fortified seat of the chiefs of Hy-Fiachrach, which was situated at Elly in the Mullet, on or near the position of Bingham's Castle. Several castles belonging to the Barrets and Burkes have also been entirely destroyed.

Some of the ruins still remaining are of pagan origin, others are ecclesiastical structures. The principal pagan antiquities are the duns or forts, both stone and earthen, the monuments, &c. There are several duns, both within the district actually treated of in this Paper, and along the coast line of the surrounding country; those within the Mullet are *Dunnamoe*, a stone fort of large size, built on a rocky promontory overhanging the sea, and formerly one of the most perfect on this coast; of late years, however, it has suffered severely, the greater part of the wall has been broken down to afford building material for houses and walls about Belmullet; the guard-chambers mentioned by O'Donovan and others are now almost destroyed, the outworks thrown down. One part of the wall alone

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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[412]
[415]
[407]

FIG. 1. 'The toothed sickle (1), the flail (2), the one-eared spade (4), the clod-breaking mallet (5), and seek-rake (7), the upright churn (6), and the three-legged pot (3), can all be closely matched in illustrations of English medieval rural life.'

district to another. The interest of these relics is enhanced when one discovers parallels among simple societies in distant parts of the world.

These ancient diversities are being ironed out at an increasing rate, and the opportunity of seeing and, what is more important, placing on record these age-old crafts and rites will soon pass. The wonder is that so many have persisted through the political, economic and social upheavals of the last 150 years. During that period the steady decline of the Gaelic language resulted in the loss of a great deal of information on local and regional life and of a vast store of oral literature, in which the lore of an ancient civilization was enshrined. The scientist must regard this loss as a tragedy comparable to that suffered by the historian in the disastrous burning of the Dublin Four Courts in

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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[412]

FIG. 21. Fireside with quern, Belturbet, Co. Cavan.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6
County Antrim

PLATE 6

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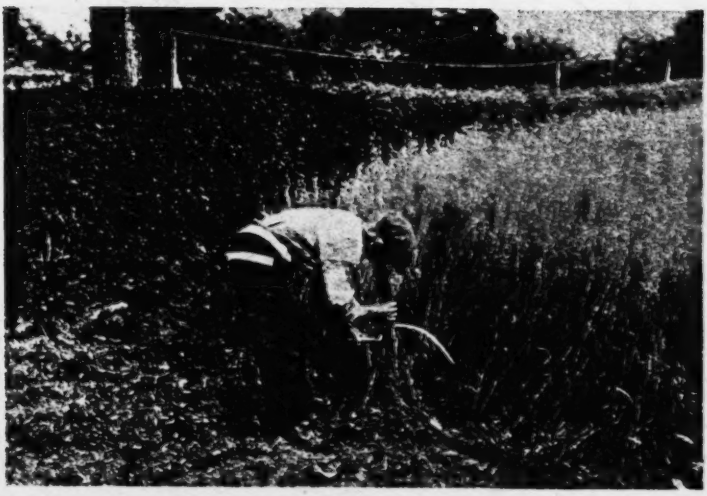

1. Shearing oats with the toothed sickle, Co. Antrim.

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2. Threshing oats with flails, Co. Antrim.

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13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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X

PLOUGH AND SPADE

STRONG arms have been the Irish labourer's passport to labouring jobs overseas, and it may be recalled that the word 'navvy' derives from the canal-diggers or navigators, many of them Irish, who opened the waterways of industrial England. Later it was Irish labourers who built the first railroad tracks of North America. Those arms were toughened by spade-work in field and bog, for the Irish spade is much more than a gardening tool: it was, and still is in backward areas and in the boglands, an implement for field cultivation and for cutting turf. The small field pattern of all except the most fertile regions is in part a reflection of this historic fact. An acre or two and often less in area, the tiny hillside fields are a measure of spade work just as the wide prairie wheatlands mirror the multiple plough or the mounded garden plots of an African village are the mark of women's work with mattock and digging-stick. Even in the deep-soiled lowlands where the plough is now universal the observant eye, still more the viewer from the air, will pick out the narrow ridges made by the spade faintly showing, as in a palimpsest, through the more regular pattern of wide plough ridges. In hilly country, especially in the west, the spade is still in common use in the fields, and the traveller moving about Ireland in spring, when the potatoes are being planted, will notice an astonishing variety of spades in use. Even in districts where the plough is universal the spade may still be pressed into service to deal with stony patches or awkward corners, and I have seen it supplementing the plough in another way by being tied on to a lea plough to convert it into a double-sided drill plough.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

412 The Irish spade is not a digging implement: it is essentially a ridge-maker or hand-plough, adapted to the business of undercutting and turning the sod. Its narrow bent blade is ill fitted to the lifting of soil, and for this purpose the long-handled shovel is used, an efficient implement for lifting loose earth and placing it with precision where required, for example to fill holes on the ridges. The Irish spade is more specialized and more primitive than the 'common or garden' English spade (Fig. 41).

407 412 The evidence of the Irish Law Texts and the discovery of plough coulters on sites of pre-Norman date show that heavy

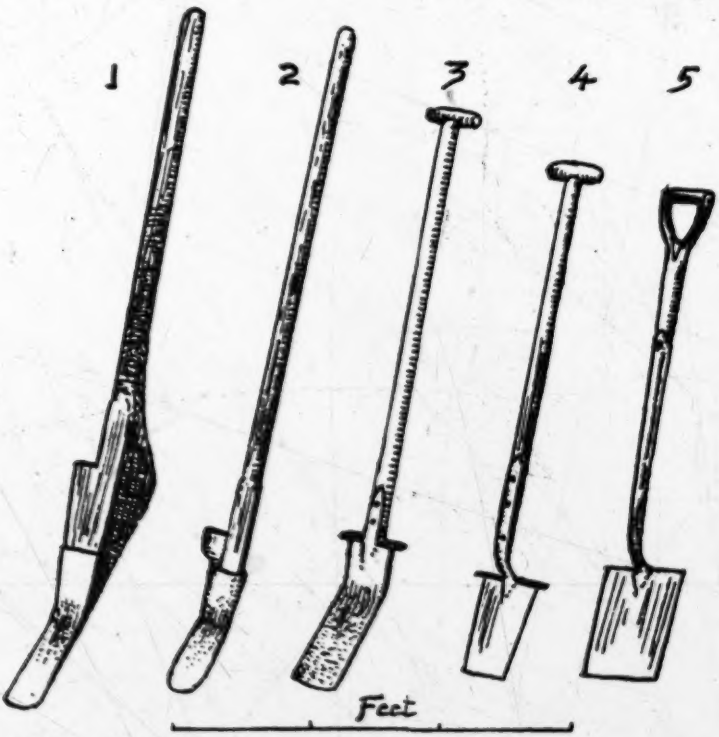

FIG. 41. Spades. The five examples form an approximate evolutionary series. (1) Loy, Co. Leitrim. (2) One-eared spade, Kerry. (3) Two-eared bent ridging spade, Fermanagh. (4) Treaded garden spade, Wexford. (5) English spade

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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ploughs were known in parts of Celtic Ireland, but the light plough or *ard* almost certainly prevailed, and it is unlikely that ploughs of any kind were employed outside the 'few favoured acres' of the infield. A light plough, at any rate, would be unfit to break the tough sod of the outfield, which was allowed to rest for long periods. Even today the answer I have been given when I have asked ridgemakers in old outfield why they were using spades has been: '"Tis too tough for the plough!' Ploughing 'by the tail', similarly, becomes intelligible only if one envisages it as restricted to infield cultivation. The iron plough with curved mould board did not reach the outlying corners of the country until late in the nineteenth century, and down to the time of the famine iron ploughs were used only in progressive areas where there were improving landlords. The prototype of these ploughs was the Scottish two-horse swing plough invented by James Small about the year 1765. By the end of the century it had reached Ireland (and also Norway) and it was a powerful instrument in breaking down the archaic system of openfield husbandry. The Irish were amazed when they first saw a ploughman with a Scots plough both driving the horses and holding the stilts.[1]

Under the traditional system ploughing was 'merely marking the land with furrows'[2]: a spade or mattock was commonly needed to turn back the earth, and to force the share into the ground it was often necessary to have a man walking alongside the plough, pressing down on the beam with a stout stick. No bits or reins were used, and the plough itself required two men or a man and a boy, 'one to hold and one to drive', that is one holding the plough stilts and the other leading the horses by walking backwards before them. Evidently the man at the handles needed to give all his attention to the plough. It was, as a Cavan man described it to me, a process of 'jerking up and down'. Many of these practices were probably taken over from the days of ox-teams. Ploughing with oxen is believed to have died out in late medieval times, though it was reintroduced by some landowners in the late eighteenth century. The small farmer did not use oxen for the plough because unlike horses

[1] R. Thompson, *Meath* (1802), 111.
[2] I. Weld, *Roscommon* (1832), 656.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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407 they could not be put to other purposes such as going to the
241 fair.

[231] The wooden plough has now been almost entirely replaced by the iron plough, but in many districts a wooden plough, often converted from a lea plough, is preferred for opening drills (Fig. 42). The potato growers of the kingdom of Mourne in Co. Down, for example, find that it suits their stony soils and is less likely to be damaged by boulders. The rough wooden mould-boards carry the earth with them and distribute it more evenly than the iron drill-plough, which tends, moreover, to 'put a skin' on the soil and to pile up pointed ridges which would require to have their tops flattened later.

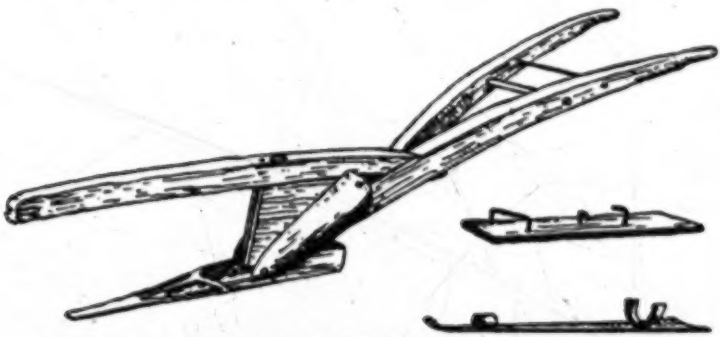

FIG. 42. Wooden drill plough and plough slides, Co. Down: the lower slide is of iron.

The improved wooden plough did not reach remote hill regions until roads were built after the middle of the eighteenth century. Even in the nineteenth century it is described as a newcomer in Co. Donegal, where spade labour had previously
●[412] been supplemented only by 'a crooked stick armed with a bit of iron, with a second stick grafted to it to give two handles'.[1] This archaic implement must have resembled the wooden 'ard' (araire) of Mediterranean lands. It was so light that when the improved wooden plough with mould-board was introduced into Donegal the ponies were not equal to the task of pulling it. In west Cork the new wooden ploughs were not to be

[1] John Hamilton, *Sixty Years Experience as an Irish Landlord*, 47.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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version of the foot-plough. This is an almost unexplored field of rural history. Mr. Aitken is of the opinion, however, that the left-sided plough goes with the use of the right hand as holding hand.

At any rate it is interesting to find that in Ireland the majority of diggers use the right foot, and although in theory the wooden foot-rest of the native one-eared spade can be fitted either to left or right of the narrow blade it is, in the west, almost invariably on the right side. Presumably only habitually left-handed people use the left foot. In eastern Ireland, on the other hand, and particularly in the Protestant districts of the north-east, the left foot is normally the digging-foot, though judging from the proportions of right to left (about one to three in the north-east), the old Irish stocks continue to dig with the right foot. Hence there is a basis of fact in the phrase 'digging with the wrong foot'. (To say that someone digs with the other foot is in Ireland an oblique way of referring to his religious faith.) The old Irish spade, we have seen, is a highly specialized tool. It may have been preceded by some kind of hoe or planting stick such as are represented today by the graffan or the steeveen which we describe in the following chapter.

We have no direct evidence of Bronze Age ploughs in Ireland, though marks of furrows have been observed underneath burial barrows of that period in Jutland and Holland and it has been claimed that the *ard* had reached the west Baltic region before the end of the Neolithic phase. However this may be the sod-cutting spade, which could be supplemented by the wooden shovel, is not likely to have been introduced much before the beginning of the Christian era, since it required an efficient knowledge of iron-working. By facilitating the building of ridges it would have improved crop yields during a climatic period, the sub-Atlantic, which was even wetter than at present. A mould-board plough capable of forming ridges did not reach Ireland on present evidence until about the seventh century, and as we have seen it had not been adopted in parts of the west until the nineteenth century. Thus the narrow spade, coming into use at about the same time as oats, would have been a factor in stabilizing settlement by permitting ridge cultivation on the outfield grazing ground round about. This is speculative,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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but it is at least clear that with the introduction of the potato in the seventeenth century it was the spade that facilitated the breaking-in of rough pasture by means of 'lazy-beds', and so made possible the great expansion of cultivation and population in the century before the Great Famine. To this day the one-eared spade, in endless variety, has kept its medieval simplicity and diversity, though it is fast disappearing in favour of the two-eared spade. It may still be seen in the west and south, and a heavy variety is at home in the upper Shannon basin, in the counties of Leitrim, Sligo, west Cavan, Longford, and Roscommon. This is the loy (Fig. 41) a veritable foot-plough with a massive heavy handle expanding on one side into a foot-ledge and below into a stout heel which acts as a pivot when the undercut sod is being turned over in ridge-making. 'This machine they prefer to ploughs', wrote McParlan.[1] Seasoned old men will tell you that they couldn't make ridges unless they had a loy, and they add, scornful of the rising generation, that 'the young people going nowadays couldn't carry a loy'. There was much opposition to the light two-eared spades when they made their appearance in the early nineteenth century. They were objected to above all because, the diggers not wearing boots—the native shoe was at best a flimsy raw-hide cover—the iron would cut their feet. To this day the Irish two-eared spade is distinguished from the English spade by having iron foot-plates (Fig. 41).

The metal spade probably began its life as a mere cutting edge of iron attached to the mouth of a narrow wooden spade. It is still little more than an attachment to a wooden shaft, consisting of an open iron socket which folds around the end of the shaft and passes at an angle into a strong narrow blade. I regard the loy as the most primitive type because the pivot or 'lift' is largely in the heel of the wooden shaft or 'tree', whereas in the rather lighter Munster spade—variants of which are also found in Kilkenny and Galway—the whole pivot is provided by the bent blade. The Longford-Cavan loy, which is adapted to heavy glacial or peaty soils, is a very clumsy digging tool, though well adapted for sod-turning. In experienced hands the loy 'would go in of itself' thanks to its weight and the expanded

[1] J. McParlan, *Leitrim* (1802), 25.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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412 mouth which opened a way and prevented the blade from wedging.

It was reckoned that twelve men armed with loys could turn an acre a day.[1] This compares not unfavourably with the estimated rate of 'ploughing' with a caschrom, and is nearly twice the speed of spade digging. In the Munster spade the foot-rest is a separate piece of wood which is wedged into the open socket to one side of the shaft, normally the right. The shape of this wedge, and the dimensions and curve of the iron blade, vary from one district to another. When new the spade mouth has two points resembling a fish-tail, or the blade may taper to the mouth to facilitate digging in light gravelly soils. The old Galway spade has its footpiece cut out of a single piece of wood to which a separate handle is attached. This is considered to lessen the shock when the spade is thrust into the ground, and the device is frequently found on old-fashioned turf spades. A curious forked spade formerly common in Mayo also has this feature. This is the 'gowl-gob', a two-eared wooden spade with twin narrow iron-shod blades, and it was reckoned to be very suitable for making ridges in loose sandy or boggy soils (Fig. 43). This may be the last survival of a prehistoric spade, for 'a two-pointed pronged spade' is said to be an ancient Mediterranean tool,[2] and a 'bidente' is used in parts of Spain.

The two-eared iron spade which is replacing the loy in its last lairs has gradually ousted the one-eared spade in most parts of the country during the course of the nineteenth century. But in doing so it has copied even the minor variations of the spades it replaced, so that the spade remains an index of regionalism, a tool of sociological research as well as an instrument of labour (Fig. 44). Until water-driven tilt-hammers were introduced for the manufacture of spades—perhaps half a dozen of them are still in operation—they were made by local blacksmiths for local customers. A good spade-maker occasionally won a reputation which might be compared to that of a medieval sword-forger. The smith needed two helpers to hammer out the metal plates, and the work was very heavy.

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[1] Coote, *Cavan* (1802), 31.

[2] *The Cambridge Economic History* (Eds. J. H. Clapham and E. Power), I (1941), 94.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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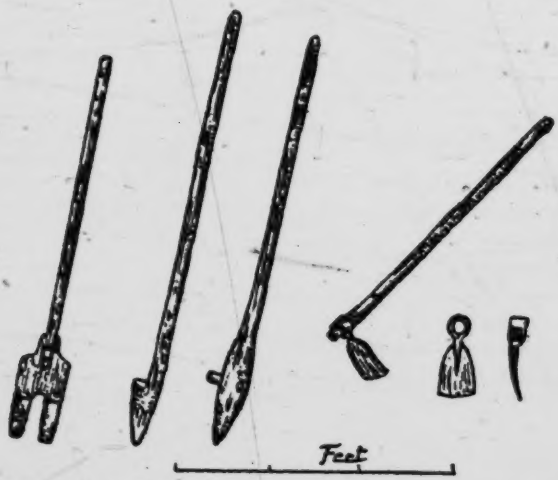

FIG. 48. 'Gowl-gob', Co. Mayo; steeveens, Longford and Cavan; and graffan, Kerry.

The precise requirements of each group of townlands forming a neighbourhood-unit resulted from the balance of many physical, human and economic factors—such as conditions of soil and slope, methods of digging, types of crop, length of arm and leg—cemented by usage and sanctioned by tradition. The 'spade gauge book' of a County Tyrone factory, which has lately closed, lists some 230 different patterns, not counting the special turf spades, and it served only Ulster and the west. I quote the dimensions for the length and breadth, at shoulder and mouth, of the spades of a few districts in Ulster to illustrate the variety and precision of the gauges: Armagh, 18 in. × $5\frac{13}{16}$ × $6\frac{11}{16}$; Omagh, $17\frac{1}{2}$ × $5\frac{1}{2}$ × $6\frac{1}{4}$; Dungannon, $17\frac{1}{2}$ × $5\frac{7}{8}$ × $5\frac{7}{8}$; Portrush, 16 × $6\frac{3}{4}$ × $6\frac{1}{2}$; Kilkeel, 15 × $6\frac{1}{4}$ × $4\frac{1}{8}$; Monaghan, 20 × $4\frac{7}{8}$ × 6. It will be noticed that the spades vary not only in size but also in shape, some having 'broad points', that is expanding at the mouth, some 'narrow points', that is tapering, and others being parallel sided. The blades range in weight from 3 to 6 lb., in length from 13 to 22 in., in width at the shoulder from $3\frac{1}{4}$ to 8 in. and at the mouth from 3 to 8 in. In addition great attention is paid to the longitudinal

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[Text continues on p. 137]

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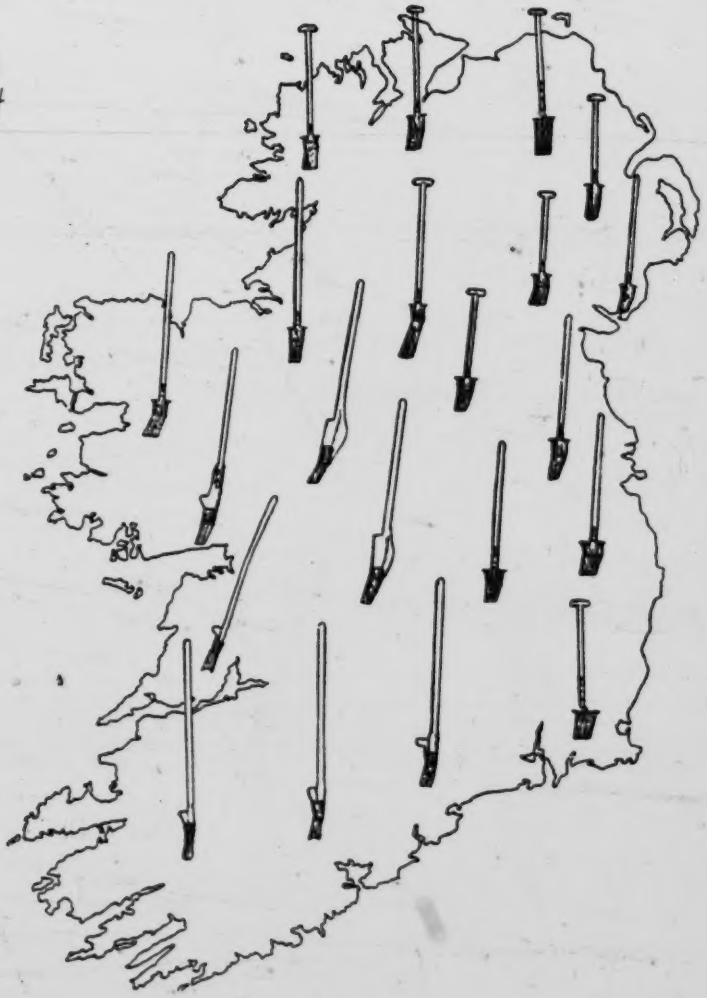

FIG. 44. Map of spade types.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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bend or 'lift' of the blade and to the lateral bend or 'dish'. The lift may be well distributed or it may be concentrated at one point: it may be curved or cranked.

The shape of the blade being thus precisely standardized for each area, various sizes are made to suit individual users and also the seasons of the year. Thus four or five spades of different sizes, ranging say from 13 to 17 in. in length, will be seen on sale in the market towns. In addition some longer spades may be offered for old-fashioned folk, for the blade of the spade is now made shorter than it used to be. These shorter spades, required for digging potatoes, retain the often awkward shape of the long spring spade—designed for ridge-making—which is going out of favour with drill cultivation.

The Irish spade differs from the English not only in its narrow bent blade but also in its thickened sides, its foot-plates, its straight handle and the short straight straps or tails to which the handle is attached. Whereas the English spade derives its digging power from the curvature above the blade, in the Irish spade the curvature is all in the blade. Moreover the Irish prefer a long shaft (4 ft.) without hand-grip, though in Ulster the shaft is short (3 ft.) and headed, i.e. fitted with a cross-piece at the end. The headed shaft, however, is replacing the long headless shaft which is better adapted to the process of sod turning than to digging. With the headed shaft the control of the spade is mainly in the hand that grips the head, which thus tends to be the right hand: consequently this type of spade goes with left-footed digging (Fig. 41).

These differences are largely explained by differences of function, for the primary purpose of the Irish two-eared spade, like the loy which it has replaced, is to turn the sod. It is a hand plough rather than a digging tool, and it owes its remarkable development to the expansion of potato cultivation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. To the new crop, as we shall see, the old method of burying the seed in prepared beds was quickly adapted, for ridge cultivation was ideally suited to a root-planting culture, and in fact potatoes are grown in ridges on the Andean plateaux. Thus the adoption of the potato helped to perpetuate tools and methods of cultivation which might otherwise have died out. Nowadays, however,

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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4/2 [244] drill-cultivation has replaced lazy-beds over most of the country. Some ridge-making tools have almost entirely disappeared, 4/2 for example the mattock and the breast-plough, which were once [178] characteristic respectively of the south-west and the north-east of the country and which may still be seen occasionally in Cos. Kerry and Antrim. The mattock ('graffan') is a tool of ancient [171] lineage which finds its parallels in Wales, in Spain and Mediterranean lands, and throughout the tropics (Fig. 43). In Kerry and west Cork it has had many uses—for breaking sods and

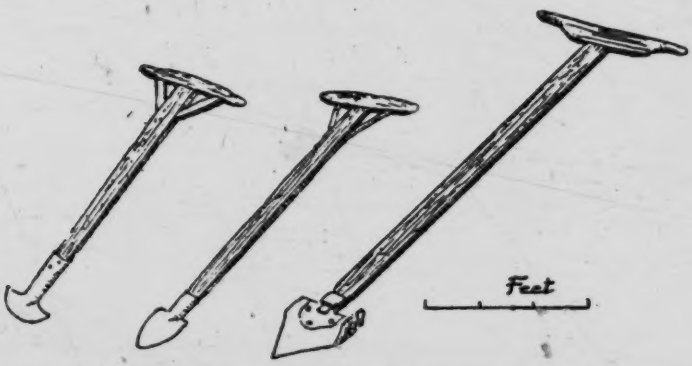

FIG. 45. Flachters or breast-ploughs, north-east Ireland. (1) North Antrim. (2) Co. Tyrone. (3) Mid-Antrim.

clods on the ridges, for loosening the earth of the furrows before shovelling, and also for cutting sods for ridge-making, for 'paring and burning' and for roof-covering. Arthur Young describes the process of graffaning a field by rolling the sod with the foot as it was cut: it was reckoned very heavy work.[1] The breast-plough or flachter (Fig. 45) served the same purpose in Cos. Antrim and Londonderry and earned the same reputation. This instrument is now largely restricted to paring bogland in preparation for turf-cutting. During the second world war I broke in a neglected mountain garden by making lazy-beds with a flachter and I heartily agree with the verdict of an Antrim labourer: 'half a day with it was enough for any ordinary

[1] A. Young, *Tour*, 2, 10.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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mortal, but there was ones made a profession of it and could keep on most of a day.' The normal flachter is wingless after the Scots pattern: the winged blade of English type, curiously restricted to mid-Antrim (Fig. 45), is probably a landlord's introduction. 4/2

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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an English introduction since 'sowing baskets' are listed in the 241
medieval pipe-rolls of the Pale. In parts of the west, for example
Mayo, a skin tray was used for sowing. But the usual Irish
method is to sow from a linen sheet, kept specially for the pur-
pose, which is tied round the sower. The seed is thrown with a
one-handed cast, and it is not everyone's privilege to be allowed
to undertake this important task. It calls for skill and concen-
trated care, for 'a missed bit' is a bad omen, foretelling death [787]
The seed should all be safely 'buried' by the beginning of May,
and in Co. Armagh the first cuckoo's call was taken as a sign.
To be found sowing corn after this was a mark of deep disgrace: [825]
the laggard was labelled 'a cuckoo farmer'.

With modern ploughs and improved drainage it is not often,
save in the tiny fields of the west, that one comes across cereal
crops sown in ridges, but the lazy-bed method is very generally
employed for potatoes and other crops where the spade is used,
though the great bulk of the potato crop is sown in drills. The
potato ridge presumably derives its name, lazy-bed, from the
fact that the sod under the ridge is not dug: the bed is built up
on top of the grass with sods and soil dug from the trenches
between the ridges. Not only does this method make full use
of the humus and decaying grass but it prevents the sets from
becoming waterlogged and rotting, for the whole bed is raised
above the water-table. And the unbroken sod checks the down-
wash of plant nutrients. The trenches or furrows between the
ridges provide open drains, and the lazy-beds are always care-
fully aligned with the slope of the land. Moreover, when the
trenches are dug a second time for earthing the potatoes,
they often go deep enough to penetrate the hard layer of iron
pan which tends to form under heavily leached soils by the
washing down of iron salts. This the old-fashioned plough could
not do. Breaking the impermeable pan not only improves the
drainage but provides minerals which are returned to the topsoil
when the potatoes are earthed. The ridges in which potatoes
are grown in their Andean homeland appear to be similar to the
Irish lazy-beds, and tuber crops throughout the tropics are
planted in ridges or mounds, but the ridge-technique is cer-
tainly older than the potato in Ireland. Clearly an efficient 241
slovel is a requirement in the construction of ridges of any 412

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241 412 width, and it is here that the long-handled shovel comes into its own. In Britain such a shovel, which remains characteristic of south-west England, is of at least Roman antiquity. Specimens from the Roman period are, however, made entirely of wood, and several similar shovels of unknown age have been found in the Irish bogs (Fig. 47). In the west, down to famine times, the common shovel was made of a single piece of wood, usually willow, shod with a narrow strip of iron along the edge.[1]

FIG. 47. Long-handled shovels used for finishing the ridges. The wooden one was found at Glenoe, Co. Antrim.

241 [407] In some districts potato ridges are made with the plough, either with an ordinary lea-plough or else with a special paring-plough, fitted with a wide sock, which reproduces the special feature of the lazy-bed, that is, it does not break the grass of the bed but inverts a wide sod on to it from either side. In both instances the trench is then broken up by a plough with the mould board removed to provide earth for shovelling on to the ridges. The much wider corn ridges were normally made with the plough, except in those retarded mountainy districts where the plough seems never to have been adopted. Wheat was grown on narrower ridges, some five to seven feet wide. In Co. Londonderry it was customary to plough a 'rid-hint', that is, to take a second furrow out of the subsoil of the trench to facilitate drainage.[2] We can readily picture the arable land as eighteenth century observers saw it, with 'the strips piled high and the furrows scraped bare'. Lazy-beds vary in width according to local conditions and conventions and may be as little as

[1] W. R. Wilde, *Catalogue* (1857), 207.
[2] G. V. Sampson, *Memoir* (1814), 282.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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County Fermanagh
County Antrim

PLATE 9

314
516
493
291
412

1. Cutting turf (underfooting) in a Co. Fermanagh bog.

314
417
493
291

2. Building a peat stack, Co. Antrim.

[FACING p.144]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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County Meath

PLATE 10

314
291
[412]

1. Spreading mud turf with long-handled shovel, Co. Meath.

[516]

2. "Running" the spread turf.

[FACING p. 145]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

241 west, for it means that the ridges can be prepared beforehand as opportunity offers. What is known as the Munster mode of planting 'with the back of the spade' is to thrust the narrow spade through the inverted top sod and drop the set behind the blade as it is levered forward. On the average three rows of potatoes go to each bed, but there are also one- two- and four-set ridges.

241 A special wooden dibber known as the steeveen, kibbin (little spade) or gugger is employed for planting in Cavan, Leitrim
412 and Longford and may perhaps be correlated with the heavy loy as another archaic tool which has kept its hold in that area. The steeveen with its conical head (Fig. 48) will break through the toughest sod and open a way for the young sprouts. Typi-
[462] cally 'guggering' is woman's work, the children following,
[857] dropping in the sets and closing the hole with a fork or a mell. I like to think that the steeveen is descended from that universal tool of the women of humble cultivating societies, the digging or planting stick, remote ancestor of the spade. It is a plausible theory that the crops of wheat and barley sown by the first Irish cultivators were planted in this way in the ashes of burnt woodland on the mountainsides. Larger dibbers or 'stamps' with several teeth for planting corn were used until quite recently in some counties, for example Armagh (Fig. 49).

[407]

FIG. 49. Dibbers and (*centre*) sowing fiddle, Co. Armagh.

They are probably the descendents of specimens introduced by English 'planters' of the early seventeenth century. It is the
[539] dibberhole which is referred to in the rhyme which has outlived the action it once accompanied:

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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241 have been greatly accelerated in the eighteenth century, thanks no doubt to the stimulus of contemporary English practice, but it may well be that the custom perpetuates the prehistoric method of clearing the land for cultivation. The fact that burning the land was prohibited by various Acts of Parliament in Ireland would point to its being another abominable native custom, like ploughing by the tail. We have referred to the graffan as a [412] skinning tool of ancient lineage, and may add that in Devon and Cornwall the implement used 'in the infancy of the art of paring'[1] was a mattock or adze which also served as a clod-breaker. The 'hack' of the Pennine country comes to mind here. The flachter, the Highland equivalent of the breast-plough which became the standard English paring instrument, may well be, in fact, the ancestor of the breast-plough, and I suggest that it came into use for skinning the outfield before burning and planting. We know that outfield cultivation of burnt-over forest lasted in France, in the Vosges country, into the eighteenth century, and the custom probably survived long enough in Ireland to be replaced by 'paring and burning'. This view is certainly in line with the other evidences of cultural continuity from prehistoric times. The customs of throwing the ashes of May Day and Midsummer bonfires into the fields and the mixing of peat ash from the hearth with the seed corn may be magical residues of the ancient practice of firing the land before sowing.

241 We shall describe in a later chapter the various methods of carrying manure to the fields: here we may refer to another 412 simple implement which serves in the preparation of the ridges. This is the clod-breaking wooden mallet or mell, resembling a croquet mallet (Fig. 1). The subject of our drawing might have been taken straight from the Luttrell Psalter of the fourteenth century, but it is a mell which I saw in use in Co. 241 Armagh a few years ago. Hurling sticks served the same pur- 526 pose in some southern counties,[2] and one wonders whether the Gaelic game of hurling evolved in this way by playfully knocking a rounded stone among the rigs. Patrick Geddes amusingly, if erroneously, traced the origin of the game of golf back to the

[1] *Loudan's Encyclopædia of Agriculture* (1831).
[2] W. Tighe, *Kilkenny* (1802), 182.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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idle Scots shepherd who with his crook knocked a white sea pebble into a rabbit hole among the dunes. And one recalls the theory that the game of cricket, with its 22-yard pitch, had its beginnings in the English openfields among ploughboys (players) and landlords' sons (gentlemen) who threw clods at the ploughman's marking sticks across the chain-wide acre strips completed at the end of a day's work. At any rate cricket has not strayed far from the English openfields and village greens, and in Ireland it clings to the larger towns and to the English-settled areas along the east coast.

Among other implements for preparing the soil the roller is probably of no great antiquity, though examples of wood or stone are of considerable interest. Alternatively, flat boulders or specially-built clod-slipes are driven over the ploughed ground, the driver being carried along on the platform thus provided and adding to its weight. I have seen the former in Co. Wexford and the latter in Co. Down. In the west the breaking of clods on the ridges is done by hand with a heavy rake (Fig. 1), and the 'harrows' which were formerly pulled by the horse's tail was a similar implement, a block of wood armed with a few wooden teeth. Even the larger harrows were a source of amusement to visiting farmers like Arthur Young, 'more fit to raise laughter than soil', as one observer put it.

The weeding and protection of the young corn were serious matters in the days when a patch of oats provided a family with its only cereal food. The tethering and herding of livestock were universal habits, and hand-weeding was another task for the young folk. O'Flaherty writes of Connacht: 'They go and lie prostrate or sit upon the corn, to weed it with their bare hands, leaving nothing behind but pure corn'.[1] Swedes are almost invariably weeded and thinned by hand. Thistles growing in corn or flax are pulled with special pincers or 'clips' made either of iron or more usually of wood, of a type which is illustrated in the Luttrell Psalter. The very similar French weeders known as Havre pincers were also used for catching eels. Docks were removed with a heavy forked spud (Fig. 50). There were other less arduous ways of inducing a bounteous crop. The custom of placing a sickle in the corn-field at the

[1]R. O'Flaherty, *H'Iar Connaught* (1684), 59.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

241
[412]

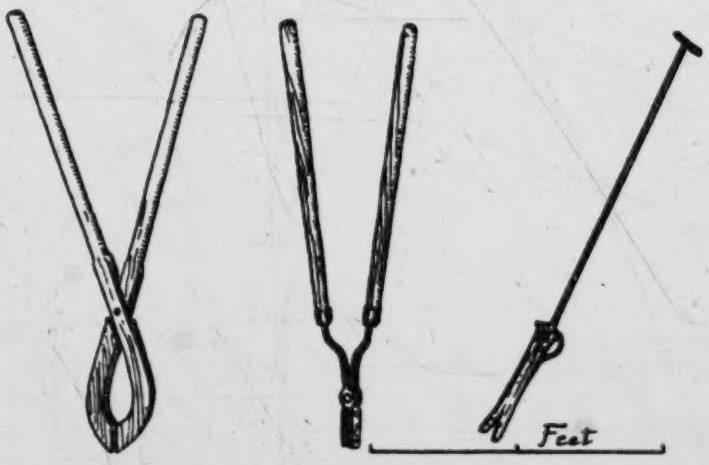

FIG. 50. Weeding 'clips', Antrim and Armagh, and iron dock-lifter, Antrim.

Midsummer festival was an easy way of showing the spirits of the corn what was expected of them. You might also hope to transfer ill-luck to someone else's crop by burying a dead animal, [787] a piece of meat, or even an egg on his land. It would be worth while listening for the call of the cuckoo on the first day of July, for to hear it was a sign of a good harvest. Prognostications were so many and so easily procured that they apparently provided a fatalistic society with a ready means of avoiding steady work. In some parts of the country, docks, thistles and [824] couch grass were apparently regarded as a good sign, because they kept the crop warm.[1]

[1] W. Bence Jones, *A Life's Work in Ireland*, 87.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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XII

HARVEST

THANKS to the necessity of 'winning' (seasoning) hay and corn in the fields before the crops are carried home, harvest time drags on from late summer to the edge of winter, and the word 'harvest' as we have seen is a synonym for autumn. In this pastoral Irish country the hay harvest is nowadays of vital importance in farm economy, yet I cannot find any evidence that hay played a significant part in the traditional Gaelic system of farming. It is the sickle, not the scythe, which figures in folk-lore and in place-names, and the scythe seems to be a relative newcomer in most parts of the country. It requires a stone-free sward which would be hard to seek on hill farms. The business of hay-making was, I believe, of little importance until the economic changes of the agrarian revolution and the introduction of rotation grass. In the North the date of the first hay-cutting is fixed by a celebrated but relatively new festival, the Orangeman's day on the 12th of July. After hay comes flax, which is pulled from late July to mid-August, followed by wheat and barley in the areas where they are grown, by the corn harvest in September and the potato-lifting in October. In bad years hay may still be uncut in late August, the mountain corn is green even at the end of September, and late-cut corn sometimes stays stacked in the fields up to Christmas—indeed there are records of the grain being reaped after Christmas[1]—but traditionally all harvest work was completed by All-Hallows.

In Scandinavia it has been claimed that hay-making began in pre-historic times as a result of the climatic deterioration which took place during the last millennium B.C. In Ireland with its

[1]For example in 1817. J. Donaldson, *Upper Fews*, 25.

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246 milder winters there seems to have been no such response. Although there has been hay-making on the rich meadows of Co. Meath, for example, since medieval times, when the English openfield system was introduced, I have found no literary or archaeological evidence for it anywhere in early Ireland. Indeed Giraldus Cambrensis expressed surprise in the [114] twelfth century that the Irish neither made hay nor built stalls for cattle, and despite his untrustworthiness I believe his witness may be accepted in this instance. Hay-making would have begun on the river bottoms (callows, holms) which, being liable to floods, were not available for winter grazing: this meadow hay is today much less important than 'upland' hay, the significant term used for rotation grass. The hay-making season is nowadays a time of toil for all members of the family, but I suspect that the period from midsummer to late July was under the old order a slack season, the time for raiding and fighting, and catching the English bending in the hayfields. For the Irish it was the 'blue month', when food was scarce (July is also called 'the hungry month') and the meal bins empty. In Ulster at any rate, for reasons which may be older than King William III, July is the holiday month and the time for faction fights. Sir John Myres used to say that in the Mediterranean world, where there is little grass to make hay, the month of May was the slackest time of the summer, the [721] favourite time for fighting instead of hay-making. In Ireland as in classical Greece the winter climate made it difficult and unsportsmanlike to go to war at that season.

To judge from present practice on the tiny farms of the west of Ireland, grass was cut as required from field-banks and odd [462] corners, a creelful at a time to give to the cow as a 'bribe' at milking time, and it was woman's work. The hook used for [412] this purpose, the grass or scythe hook, is smooth-edged, unlike the saw-toothed corn sickle, and what hay was made in former times was probably cut for the most part with the hook. The [231] livestock would be fed in winter mainly on oatstraw, and grazed on the infield stubble, supplemented by the outfield grasses which had been allowed to mature while the bulk of the stock was at the summer booley-grounds. We may be sure that what little hay was saved was treated much as it is on mountainy

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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246 412 The Irish prefer the long-handled scythe. The sned, about five-and-a-half feet long, has the lower handgrip offset, and a pointed iron spike is sometimes driven into the end of the sned to anchor it safely when honing (Fig. 53). A test of a well-

FIG. 53. Long-handled scythe, Donegal.

sharpened scythe is that it should 'cut wool moving downstream', and there was a special charm used in sharpening. The sanded scytheboard (strickle) has now given way to the artificial stone, though hones of natural stone, including the fossilized wood of Lough Neagh, are used locally. A smith-made scythe-blade is highly prized and long after its legitimate life has ended lengths of it will be utilized for choppers and turnip knives. For full efficiency one must be measured for the fitting and hanging of a scythe. The lower handle should be at arm's length from the bottom of the sned, the upper one distant from the top by the length from elbow to finger-tips. The two handles should also be a cubit apart. The angle of the blade is determined by swinging the left leg and adjusting the blade until its point comes within a nicely determined distance of it when the sned is held upright against the right leg. The scythe cradle, for gathering the swathe as it is cut, is rarely met with in Ulster, save for makeshift devices such as a bit of sacking fitted against the 'grass-nail' which joins sned and blade in the angle where they meet. In the south and south-east of the country, where the scythe is an old introduction, quite elaborate cradles both of wood and of finely-wrought iron are to be seen.

[133] [184]

HARVEST

When the scythe was transferred from the mowing of hay to the cutting of corn during the second half of last century there was much opposition from the reapers, sometimes for the good reason that little fields full of great boulders or the stumps of bog-fir gave no space to swing a scythe, and a single blow on the fast-moving point may ruin the blade. But one suspects that conservatism was rooted in magic. It is said that the rice-growers of Malaya refuse to use a scythe because its slashing motion would frighten away the spirits of the rice. Some such notion may have strengthened the Irishman's condemnation of the scythe. And I find another curious parallel with the Far East. The Malayan reaper hums like an insect while he is cutting the rice, perhaps to soothe the spirits of the living crop. In Ireland there is an old belief that an insect kept in a little box fastened to the handle of hook or scythe will bring luck and give the blade greater cutting power. Both scythe and sickle are personal possessions and their luck is personal: they are loaned with reluctance. When a sickle is borrowed it should not be passed directly from hand to hand but thrown on the ground and then picked up. This belief, which applies to all pointed objects, may be explained by the danger of handling a sharp tool, for bad luck is often related to bad practice.

But before coming to corn harvest the handling of flax should be described. Unpleasant handling it is, even if not quite so onerous (and odorous) as working with hemp or jute. When grown for fibre flax is harvested after the pale blue flowers have fallen but before the seed ripens, and because it is the stalk that is being harvested it is not cut but pulled up by the roots. 'Lint' is a crop of the small family farm, for many hands are required, teams or 'boons' of anything from half a dozen to thirty people gathering from neighbouring farms and working together in a festival spirit which reaches its climax in the evening dance. The tough flax is hard on the hands and the stooping is back-breaking. But the beets (sheaves) are carefully put together, for they have to be spread after retting and the stalks should lie evenly. The three handfuls which compose the beet are laid down at slightly different angles so that they will separate easily. A standard beet is reckoned to be 22 inches in diameter. The bands (ties) are prepared beforehand and consist

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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stranger was accosted and held down on the ground, a woman would lie on top of him and another woman would tumble them over.[1] Such horse-play was more than a consequence of the high spirits of harvest, the 'rural saturnalia' described by Richard Jefferies in *The Toilers of the Field*. Displays of the rites and symbols of fertility were closely bound up with the bounty of harvest.

There were many variations in the methods of reaping, or shearing—to use the old term—depending on the type of hook, which might be smooth or notched, on the width of the ridges, the condition of the crop and so on. The toothed sickle is probably the older implement, going back to the time when iron was a new metal and could not be given a sharp steel edge. Whereas the smooth or scythe hook is wielded with a slashing cut which may spill the grain, especially of rye, if the crop is ripe and the edge not kept very keen, the sickle is pulled towards the shearer, who holds each bunch as it is cut, pressing it back into the standing corn. As a rule three handfuls or 'loghters' go to each sheaf, the bands of which are prepared beforehand and laid out for the reaper to place the loghters on them straight from the hook (Pl. 6, 1).

The term shearing implies that the crop was cut close to the ground as wool is clipped from a sheep, and indeed urban officials have been known to confuse the operations. Pride was taken in a stubble-field that looked as if it had been shaved. 'Low and clean' was the injunction, 'cut it down to the living earth!' 'Down with the head and up with the tail' were my instructions when I lent a hand at harvest in the Glens of Antrim. Mercifully one worked uphill: where the land was level the reaper would go down on one knee, wearing a knee-pad. If the ridges were wide there might be two shearers and one binder to each ridge, the shearers working from the furrows on each side, the depth of which minimized the amount of stooping required. A 'crack hooksman' could reap and tie fifty twelve-sheaf stooks a day, or say an Irish acre (= 1¾ English acres). It is necessary to have worked with a gang of reapers to appreciate the relentless pace of the work and at the same time the care with which every operation is carried out. There must be no

[1] M. Banks, *British Calendar Customs*, Scotland, I (1937).

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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314 [461] could account for twenty-five loads in a day, but, my informant added, 'they would need to be strong in the back and weak in the head'; as at corn harvest competitive cutting and 'striving' brought intense excitement and severe strain.

'Opening up' a bank involves first of all the removal of the top layer of tough fibrous peat—'flow' or 'fum'—to a depth of a foot or so. It grows heather, tough grasses or mosses and makes poor firing, though there are districts, especially on the islands, which have exhausted their turf and burn nothing but the even more fibrous sods or 'rough-heads' skinned off the rocks. The common spade is usually employed for opening a face, supplemented often by a sharp nicking tool, a hay-knife ● [412] or a portion of an old scythe-blade hafted for the purpose. In parts of north Ulster the thin top-layer of the mountain bogs is removed with a small variant of the breast-plough known as a flachter or flaying-spade, one of the tools which this region shares with western Scotland (Fig. 45). The term breast-plough is a euphemism, for it is really a groin-plough, pushed forward by thrusts of the thighs and groin.

The bog parings are generally spread on the cut-over bog below the bank, where they give a dry footing for the barrow-men wheeling away the turves. The pared sods in time consolidate, so that the rough grazing of the bog is preserved at a lower level. Conditions vary considerably from one bog to another, and so do the methods of working and the shapes of the tools. The minutiae of the craft are so perfected that a team of diggers works with the rhythm of a machine. Strong arms are required—a single turf may weigh up to 20 lb. when cut—but experience and a good eye are necessary for speed, and skilled 'slanesmen' are becoming scarce. Great importance was attached to 'keeping a straight face', that is keeping the cutting face vertical, and a poor digger was referred to as a 'clod-cutter'. To break a turf was almost a crime: in the old days 'they'd have thrown you out of the bog'. Not only do broken turves double the handling each time they are lifted or turned, but they tend to break adjacent turves when stacked, and the stack will show by its shape if the turf has been badly cut. At the end of the bank it is customary, in the north, to leave three steps of turf uncut. They enable one to scramble out on to the

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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uncut bog above, but one suspects that behind the custom there lies the widespread notion that a task should never be completely finished and that a small portion of anything taken by man should be left for luck or the fairies. You will be told that the steps are cut to avoid the curse of Columbkille, for it is said that the saint was once trapped in a bog hole and laid a curse on all who did not cut the three steps.

There are two methods of cutting, vertically or 'underfooting' and horizontally or 'breasting', and they tend to be used respectively on thin upland and deep lowland bogs, though these have to be cut underfoot if badly drained unless a platform or 'foot-go' of flow turf can be built up for the breaster to stand on. Also, the upper layers of brown turf which preserve some of the tough plant fibres are easier to cut vertically. Breasting not only imposes less strain on the back but speeds up the work, since the turves can be retained on the slane and placed directly on the barrow. (The vertical digger can do this only if his spade has a lift, that is bends forward.) In consequence the breast-cutter's turf-barrow will be designed for his convenience, for example it commonly has no legs so that he can swing it into position laterally by hooking the wing of his spade over the handle. Slanes, as well as barrows, will be found to vary in some slight degree from one bog to another, and a seemingly trivial difference can generally be explained in terms of differences of local conditions and techniques: the human ecology of the bogs is no less interesting than the plant ecology. In essentials the turf slane is a narrow straight-shafted steel blade with a wing set at right-angles after the manner of a cheese-knife, which is said, indeed, to owe its origin to 'an ingenious cutler of Dublin' who borrowed the idea from the slane.[1] The purpose of the wing is to detach a complete turf at a single stroke of the spade. The breadth and length of blade and wing are variables depending on many factors, but mainly on the size of turf required, and this in turn is determined to a considerable extent by the nature of the bog. If it is a very wet bog, for example, the turves must be cut larger than normal to allow for greater shrinkage on drying. When absolutely dry peat will shrink to less than one-eighth its original volume, and though air-dried peat still contains

[1]Thomas Campbell, *A Philosophical Survey of the South of Ireland*, 96

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about 25 per cent water, when cut it may have 90 per cent or more. Again, some kinds of peat come away easily so that the turves can be cut somewhat larger than the dimensions of the slane, which for ease of working is naturally made as small and light as possible.

Increasingly in this as in every other department of rural labour, standardized implements are gaining ground, but the Irish spade factories still cater for scores of different tastes. When slanes were smith-forged almost every turf-cutter had his individual tool, made to measure. The factory-made slane weighs about 3¾ lb., but the old-style slane was merely a thin sheath of steel wrapped around a wooden blade and weighing about 1½ lb. It comprised four parts, blade, spade-tree, shaft and hilt, though shaft and spade-tree were sometimes in one piece, the shaft flattening out to enter the blade in a long 'web' (Fig. 62, 1). The thick round shaft, which had to be truly centred in the blade, was polished smooth as a piston with peaty sweat rubbed in. The two-piece haft, with separate spade-tree (No. 2), gave a certain springiness which eased the work. In the same

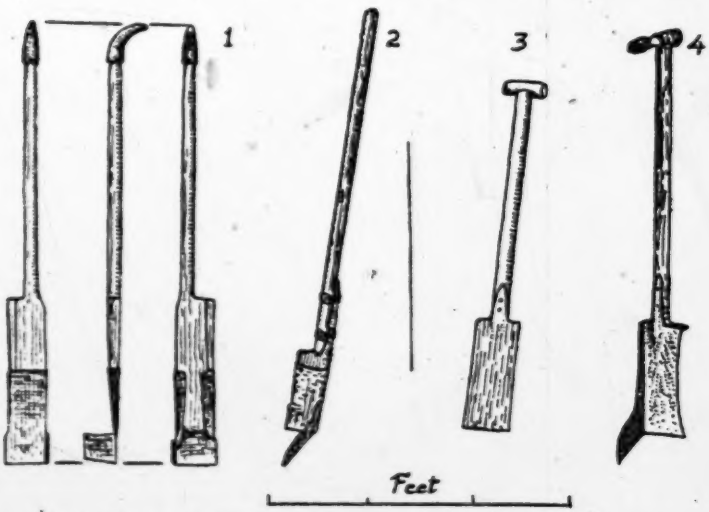

FIG. 62. Slanes old and new. Nos. 1 (Co. Antrim) and 3 (Co. Down) are breast spades; Nos. 2 (Co. Galway) and 4 (Co. Londonderry) are underfoot.

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way a separate hilt, frequently a cow's horn well polished by use, saved the strain on the palm of the hand, but many slanesmen preferred a handle shaped to their own taste and to the needs of the cutting technique required. In the Antrim Glens I have seen a bent piece of black sally carefully spliced on: this wood is said to have the virtue of absorbing sweat. The blade itself widens towards the cutting edge which is from four to six inches in width, the splay preventing the spade from sticking in the wet peat. The cutting edge of the wing is anything from four to seven inches long, and the top edge is finished in a variety of pleasing shapes and is often notched with the proprietary marks of the owner.

A breast slane can as a rule be distinguished from the underfoot by the upward slant of the cutting edge of the wing as viewed from the side with the spade held vertically, whereas the wing of the underfoot slane slopes down. This ensures that the face of the bog which is left after cutting shall be vertical when breasting and horizontal when underfooting, for the strokes are naturally made with a slight downward slope in the former case and a forward slope in the latter. Another difference is that the underfoot slane is normally provided with a foot-step on one side or the other, depending on whether the user is left or right handed. In practice the foot is not used, however, unless the peat is very tough and little humified. Bits of fibrous matter (called fog, cat or 'old wife's tow') clogging the cutting edge are troublesome, but it is kept clean by a quick preliminary jab into the peat, which reminds one of the rhythmic anvil-tapping of the blacksmith. Modern slanes tend to have the blade made all in one piece, riveted to the haft with straps and fitted with a narrow foot-plate on the side away from the wing. (Fig. 62, 4.) The breast slane has been partly replaced, especially in wet bogs, by a short-handled flat spade which cuts larger peats (Fig. 62, 3). They are of a good shape for stacking and for transport on the canal-boats and, latterly, the lorries which supply Dublin with turf.

For taking the cut peats to the spread-field two wheelers and turf barrows are the minimum needs. The severed turves may be placed directly from the spade on to the waiting barrow, but a loader is more often required, lifting two turves at a

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[412]

FIG. 66. Some tools used in the bog. (1) Trying iron for locating buried timber, Co. Cork. (2) Turf fork, Co. Armagh. (3) Fir-hatchet or 'finhow', Co. Armagh. (4) Fir-rooter, Co. Galway.

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contains no salt, but the explanation may be that it was difficult to obtain and that its addition was not necessary when the butter was preserved by burying it. This is confirmed by the following quotation which shows also that the custom of preserving butter in a bog-hole was still remembered a generation ago in Co. Limerick. Lady Carbery writes: 'In their grandfather's time, butter, flavoured with wild garlic and unsalted (salt cost too much to buy except in small quantities) used to be put in a bog-hole and left to ripen.'[1]

[1]M. Carbery, *The Farm by Lough Gur*, 128.

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as the work of specialists (Fig. 71). The pampooties of the Aran Islands deserve mention here. Made of calfskin, but formerly of sealskin,[1] these one-piece shoes were once doubtless widely worn and have kept their hold in Aran because of their suitability for wet rocks and frail curraghs. The rivlins of Scotland and the Highland *bròga* were very similar and I have seen rawhide shoes of the same type from Norway and the Pyrenees. They all have the hair outside and are secured by lacing back and front.

The wight serves both to hold corn, in filling a sack for instance, and to convey peats from the stack to the fireside: perforated it becomes a meal-sieve (boran) for sifting the skins (seeds) from oatmeal, or a buttermilk sieve for taking out the last grains of butter from the churn. The winnowing tray or dallan is a larger version, and it, too, may be perforated to allow the wind to pass through as the corn is shaken out on to a spread cloth. There are, up and down Ireland, many bold windy Shilling Hills where the 'shellings' (husks) were, in past times, separated from the grain in this way (Pl. 7).

This brings us to the flail and its 'hanging' (the mid-kipple, hooden, gad, middling, or tug) which was commonly a thong of cow-, horse-, sheep, or goat-skin, though sometimes of rabbit- or eel-skin or a cord of flax. The flail, the proverbial 'stick-and-a-half', consists of a three to four feet long helve or hand-staff, usually made of ash, and a shorter beater, swingle or souple of hazel or holly. There are two principal methods of 'hanging' the parts together. In one variety, the tie passes through two leather caps lashed over the ends (Fig. 72, 1). This appears to be a variant of the common English flail-hanging, where, however, the cap is made of steamed ash or yew and there is no linking piece. Its distribution in Ireland, down the east coast, points to derivation from England. Modifications, occurring as far west as Donegal (Fig. 72, 1*a*, *b*), have the linking thong passing through a hole made either in the helve or in the beater. Kevin Danaher states that the capped flail is characteristic of central Europe: it is believed to have first appeared in north France in the early Middle Ages.[2] The

[1] O'Flaherty, *H'Iar Connaught*, 59 (footnote).
[2] *J.C.H. and A. Soc.*, 60 (1955), 6–14.

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412 171 284 other method of hanging has a somewhat peripheral distribution in Europe (Scandinavia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Switzerland, the Pyrenees) and also in Ireland, and as its simplicity as well as its distribution suggest, it is the older type. The tie passes around grooves cut in both hand-staff and souple (Fig. 72, 2) though again there are variants, one end of the tie, for example, being passed through a hole (Fig. 72, 2*a*). The grooved hanging, it is claimed by its users, is superior to the capped because the join is almost universal and there is no need to turn the halve in the hand when flailing. The holed fastening may be the most ancient method of all: it is found in parts of Atlantic Europe and the Baltic lands, but in Ireland is apparently restricted to Ulster (Pl. 6, 2).

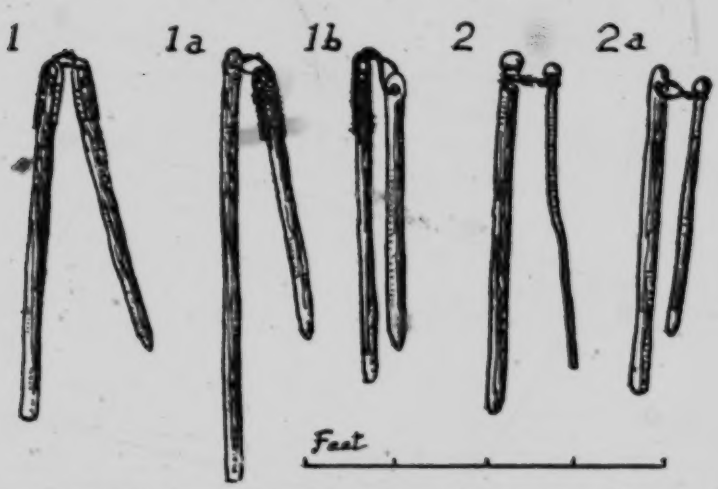

FIG. 72. Flails. (1) Co. Meath. (1*a*) Co. Armagh. (1*b*) Co. Donegal. (2) Co. Cavan. (2*a*) Co. Antrim.

243 412 171 Ancient and rudimentary as the flail is, requiring for its making no tool save a sharp knife, there are some thrashers who dispense with it, 'scutching' the corn instead with a stick or 'lashing' it over a barrel, a stone or a board (Plate 4). Many a small farmer in the north of Ireland harvests his seed grass in this way. The scutching method is used also in the

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Pyrenees and in Africa, but the flail, apparently spreading through western Europe in post-Roman times, in time replaced it almost everywhere, to be in turn displaced by the mechanical thrasher. Thus the sound of the flail has almost gone from the countryside. The best thrashing place is the floor of the barn above the byre, with its opposite doors to draw the wind and advertise the flailer's industry. Such barns, however, were not built outside the planted districts before agrarian changes and improvements spread in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ireland knows nothing of the carefully built thrashing floors of England and Scandinavia. At best on the farms lacking a barn a thrashing board was sometimes kept, a square wooden platform raised a few inches off the ground. A good thrashing floor should bend to meet the flail, and in Scandinavia, for instance, great pains were taken in the old days to construct floors which would make the flails sing. They were occasionally strung with wires, and to magnify the echo of clay floors a horse's skull was buried under each corner.[1] It has been thought that this purpose was secondary to the luck it was hoped would follow from what was originally a foundation sacrifice. In Ireland traditions of the burying of horses' skulls under the floors of dwelling houses are both widespread and well authenticated. The usual explanation again is that this gives the house an echo, but it is also said to be lucky, and Sean O'Sullivan concludes that the custom of burying skulls began as a substitute for foundation sacrifices.[2] In Armagh 'the frontal bones of a horse's head are regarded as being peculiarly sonsie; they were often buried in barn floors and under the thresholds of dwelling houses for that reason.'[3]

In time, the expressed object came to be to magnify the music of the singing flails as well as that of the ballad-singing and dancing before the fire. The space between the doors of the old style kitchen-byre, it will be recalled, was a favourite thrashing place in times past. The Briget's Crosses above the door would have blessed the thrashing as well as the cattle. It

[1]Albert Sandkelf, *Singing Flails* (Folklore Fellows Communications, Helsinki, No. 136), (1949).
[2]Seán Ó Súilleabháin, *J.R.S.A.I.*, 75 (1945), 45–52.
[3]J. Donaldson, *Upper Fenn in 1838*, 77.

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226 [415] [386] Scallop shells were put to many uses and were often a substitute for the iron oil-pan of the open-wicked crusie. Seashells were also burnt to make lime for whitewashing the houses.

[262] In late summer the sprat come ashore in vast numbers on the west and south coasts, so that in Donegal 'they constituted the chief food of the peasantry during three or four months of the year.'[1] They were taken from the water in buckets and sieves, and the mackerel pursuing their prey close against the rocks might be caught almost as easily. In Waterford harbour there were specially erected wickerwork head weirs to take the sprat; and Dr. Went has described a wattled sprat-weir in working order in the estuary of the Blackwater.[2] Fishing from the rocks, too, is most popular in harvest time and though now little more than a pastime it once provided a reserve of food for the winter. About hay-harvest the ballan wrasse is at its best, 'when the flags (wild iris) are in bloom', they say. Known as bavin, byan, morran and by other names, it is now despised nearly everywhere, as is the coalfish which was salted and dried [192] and which has different names in Gaelic for every stage of its growth to demonstrate its former importance and popularity. 'Glassan' oil was the luminant for the crusie lamps in Rathlin Island. On the north coast you may see anglers 'frassing' for small coalfish, that is attracting them by spitting into the water chewed potatoes or limpets. Formerly ground bait was made ● [412] by pounding limpets in rock basins of the type known as 'bullauns' (Fig. 90). Occasionally you may come across a fisherman casting a feather lure for pollack with a line made wholly or in part of horsehair. One method of twisting these lines, with quills, will be described in the following chapter. For short lengths next the hook—the fine foot-lines—white hair is preferred, and I have seen it made in County Down by [283] twisting the hair between the bare thigh and a hand dusted with wood ash, a method practised by 'primitives' in many parts of the world. Two strands of from fifteen to twenty hairs are twisted on each other. (The anglers in the Seine at Paris are also said to prefer a 'crop' made from a grey mare's tail.) To

[1] 'Kinnfaela', *The Cliff Scenery of South-Western Donegal*, 19.
[2] A. E. J. Went, *Antiquity*, 25 (1951), 32–35.

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believe that many examples were ground out in much the same way before the sign of the cross replaced that of the circle. Cup-marked stones are commonly found in megalithic graves, on standing stones and Bronze Age cists, both in the British Isles and further afield. Some of the larger bullauns were certainly mortars, and very similar 'knocking stones' were used until recent times for preparing barley meal by pounding the grain with a beetle or maul (Fig. 90). To judge from the frequency with which one finds a knocking stone in the ruins of an old clachan it was one of the communal possessions of such a settlement. Old specimens, more especially when the basins are sunk in an outcrop of rock, are frequently found to hold water, and they are then regarded as 'wells', the water being held efficacious as a cure for warts. That such rock-basins have magic powers is illustrated by the following reference to a site in Scotland. On the Loch Avon side of Cairngorm is a shelving rock bearing hand-made basins about a foot wide and correspondingly deep: 'sitting on them is said to be efficacious in cases of barrenness.'[1]

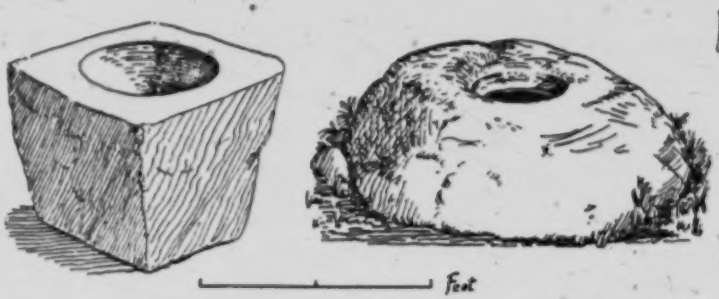

FIG. 90. Knocking stone and bullaun. Both Co. Antrim.

It is an interesting illustration of the pagan associations of cup-marks, and of the success of the symbol of the cross, that their use survived in folk practice only as cursing stones. Smooth pebbles resting in certain stone basins are turned three times against the sun. There are many examples in the west, some

[1] A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 265.